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ABSTRACT

In their book, "In Search of Excellence," Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman identify eight attributes common among the best run companies in America. These attributes have special applicability for community colleges, given their uneasy present and uncertain future. Like successful companies, community colleges should: (1) foster an orientation toward action; (2) stay close to the consumer by providing service and quality; (3) develop a simplified organizational structure that recognizes the importance of informal lines of responsibility and communication; (4) adopt a set of beliefs and values on which to base all policies and actions; (5) create an entrepreneurial atmosphere in which power and decision making are shared; (6) incorporate trust into personnel management to achieve lasting productivity gains; (7) maintain sight of their original intent and purposes; and (8) maintain tight management control, while at the same time allowing for autonomy, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Continuous innovation in the most efficient use of their resources is the key to survival and excellence for community colleges, and the most valuable resources of these institutions are its people. (LAL)

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"Continuous Innovation for the Most Efficient Use of Resources: The Key to Survival"

by

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Presented to the League for Innovation
Newport Beach, California

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If you could have anything you wanted, described by one word, what would it be? Money? Health? Happiness? These tend to be the choices of most people if given such a grand opportunity. After watching several football games over the past few weeks, outcomes were often predicated on "luck" rather than skill or strategy. However, the winning teams usually had a great deal of influence in creating their own good fortune. A bone-jarring tackle, or a last minute interception, or a blocked field goal, often contributed to the winning margin. I think my word would be luck!

Through the turn of the century we in the community colleges must have some luck to survive. However, by being creative in using the very limited resources at our disposal--not only will we survive, but we should flourish in continuing to meet the needs of younger and older adults in American society.

Community colleges are "people intense" service organizations. It takes people to serve people in our institution. To most efficiently use the resources available means using people resources in the most creative ways possible.

A book published in 1982 by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman entitled "In Search of Excellence"--Lessons from America's Best Run Companies, provides a unique framework through the identification of eight attributes common among the best run companies in America, and they have applicability to community colleges. I would like to share a few of my thoughts about these eight characteristics as they apply to the community colleges in 1983--to our operations in the uneasy times now and the somewhat uncertain times to come.

The attributes follow:

1. A bias for action
2. Close to the customer
3. Autonomy and entrepreneurship
4. Productivity through people
5. Hands-on, value driven
6. Stick to the knitting
7. Simple form, lean staff
8. Simultaneous loose-tight properties

The management attitudinal set inherent in each of these attributes can best be summarized by the phrase "people are our most important asset."

A Bias for Action

One of the most important traits among America's best run companies is that of "action orientation." Small action-oriented task forces with specific problems to solve or products to design and develop are the rule not the exception. Few large task forces exist with the charge of producing bulky reports which are immediately shelved! Task forces should be formed to produce results, not paper.

What fosters action orientation? The answer quite simply is people! People given a clear direction of institutional purpose and the lattitude to be creative will produce results! Formal and more importantly informal communications must be evident, for it takes people talking with their peers to ensure the positive atmosphere.

Community colleges and the people therein, must be willing to try new things, to step out and run the risk--and as Chief Executive Officers we must not only accept failure from our active colleagues but must encourage those

who have tried and fallen short. Among educational institutions in America, community colleges have a reputation for action--for meeting student needs quickly and expertly. This unique trait must not be lost, in fact it must be nurtured for us to flourish through the turn of the century.

Close to the Customer

In "staying close to the customer" we must first ask, who are our customers? It seems we have two sets of customers, students and employers of our students. Community colleges have been very responsive in staying close to the students by offering the right classes at the most preferred times. And, current emphasis across this country in working with business and industry will provide the second part of the magic puzzle in staying close to the customer.

If our colleges were really service obsessed would we behave differently toward students or employers of our students? And, if we had a quality obsession would we be operating the colleges as they are operated today? Service and quality come to the forefront in those companies leading the way in America!

Service and quality are characteristics of League colleges which are paving the way in meeting student needs. Coast Community College District has a service obsession and its many communities are the beneficiaries of a large vision. Norm Watson wants people served by the Coast Colleges!

Miami-Dade Community College exemplifies the quality obsession as it has placed a great deal of emphasis on improving the quality of instuction!

Service and quality will be the central themes as legislatures in every state continue debates about (1) who is to be served by community colleges and what is its mission? and, (2) who should pay for this service? All of the so-called reform issues relate to service and quality!

If we will listen more carefully to our customers than we have in past years, we will not only survive but will flourish through the turn of the century.

Simple Form-Lean Staff

American businesses have typically responded to organizational growth by creating more complex organizational structures. They hire more people to run the show. I think we have done the same thing in community colleges!

Perhaps it is time to challenge some of the axioms of management which perpetuate the pyramid organizational chart--with no more than seven to ten people reporting to a boss and eight layers of bureaucracy between the lowest and highest people with respect to authority. Waterman and Peters describe rather vividly flat organizational arrangements, small top level executive staffs, simple structures for governance, and commitments to decentralize responsibility, and the authority to go with the responsibility.

By being efficient in the very basics of our operations we will maintain stability. By regularly encouraging innovation and change an entrepreneurial mind set will develop among employees. By consistently breaking habits, calcification of the organization and its people will be avoided. (Don't tamper with faculty parking, however!)

I would like to share one example of the complexity we live with day to day in the community colleges. In Figure 1, a sample four-year technical arts curriculum--electronics is shown which begins with the eleventh grade and concludes with the community colleges grade fourteen. Working closely with Kern High School District a "two-plus-two" instructional program in several occupational areas is being designed.

FIGURE 1. A FOUR-YEAR TECHNICAL ARTS DEGREE -- ELECTRONICS

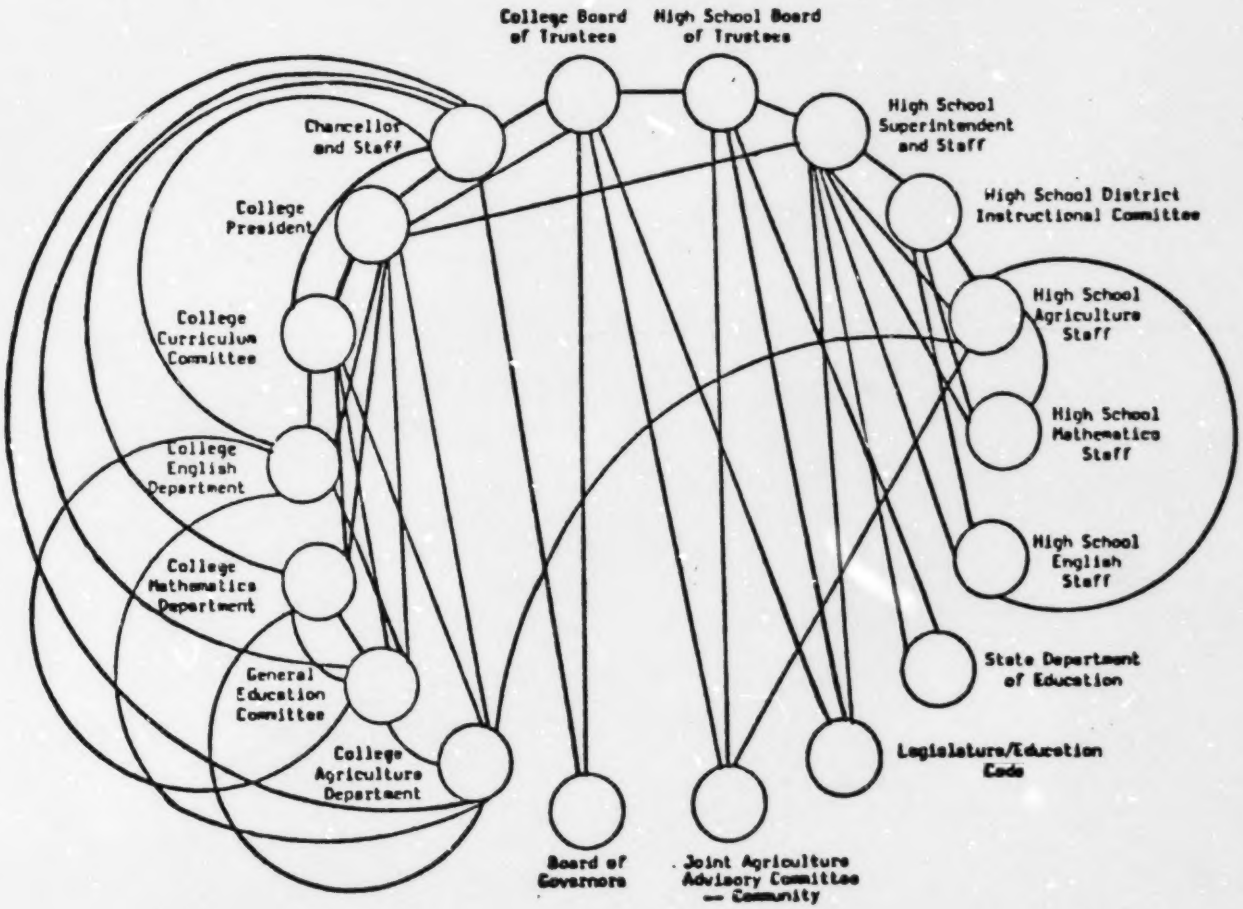
Grade 11	Algebra II English Grammar Chemistry American History Physical Education Humanities
Grade 12	Math Analysis Physics English Composition Typing - Introduction to Computer Science Physical Education American Government
Grade 13	Technical Mathematics I - Math Analysis Technical Mathematics II - Math Analysis English - Speech/Composition Electronics I Electronics II Computer Science I Computer Science II Semiconductor Circuit Analysis Physical Fitness Humanities - Interdisciplinary
Grade 14	Technical Mathematics III - Calculus Technical Mathematics IV - Calculus English -- Technical Writing Humanities -- Interdisciplinary Electro Mechanical Devices Communication Electronics I Communication Electronics II Microwave Communication Microprocessors Digital Logic Physical Fitness

Using the electronics curriculum as an example this new instructional program has the following characteristics:

1. Four-years of mathematics
2. Four years of English/Communications
3. Integrated Humanities
4. Physical Fitness
5. Technical courses which will meet the needs of industry and provide students employment while they are attending school.

To implement this cooperative venture with the high school and community college as partners, from Figure 2, Designing a New Curriculum, the complexity is almost overwhelming. From local Boards of Trustees to State agencies, from faculty groups and departments to administrative groups over eighty formal and informal communication linkages must occur in the new curriculum design process. New or modified mathematics courses, new or modified English courses, new humanities courses, and a different approach to physical education is necessary. The straight lines represent formal lines of responsibility and formal communication, and the curved lines represent informal avenues of responsibility and communications. The most important accomplishments often occur in the informal linkages.

FIGURE 2. DESIGNING A NEW CURRICULUM



The best of America's companies and the best of America's community colleges will work diligently to simplify such structures and to informalize the flow of communication and decision making.

For the community colleges to flourish through the turn of the century, as community colleges, organizational structures must be simplified and responsibility with authority decentralized -- at all levels!

Hands-On Value Driven

Any organization in order to survive and achieve success must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. The basic philosophy, spirit, and drive of an organization have far more to do with its accomplishments than do its economic resources, organizational structure or innovation.

What must we in the community colleges believe in order to flourish through 2000 A.D.?

1. A belief in being the best.
2. A belief in the importance of the details of execution--doing the job well-paying attention to the nuts and bolts.
3. A belief in the importance of people as individuals.
4. A belief in superior quality and service.
5. A belief that most members of the organization should be innovators--and at the same time be willing to accept failure.
6. A belief in the importance of informality to enhance communication.

Autonomy and Entrepreneurship

The League for Innovation takes pride in being on the cutting edge of new developments in community colleges. Over the past few years it has not only been instructive, but extremely motivating, to observe "champions"

doggedly pursuing new ideas to fruition. Knowing that any contemplated change is met with resistence, suspect, indifference and often vocal opposition means that community college leaders, whether they be faculty or administrators, must possess courage and persistence in large quantities.

To create an entrepreneurial atmosphere power and decision making must be shared. The "winners" or "champions" in the organization must be given breathing room--room to run and the opportunity to fail and try again! They must also be protected, for they will be shot at, often!

Peter Drucker said, "Whenever anything is being accomplished, it is being done by an monomaniac with a mission. In recalling the many good things coming out of the League colleges and particularly the Colleges of the Kern District, Drucker's statement is exactly on target. Groups don't accomplish much, but individuals do!

Productivity Through People

Now to the very heart of the matter! The key to survival through the turn of the century is directly related to the management of our most precious resource, people. This conference has had a major focus on technology. We have been advised, admonished, chastised and teased about the ever-changing, fascinating world of electronic gadgetry. The tools of the information society are surely available. But the tools, the hardware and the marvelous machines must be used to help people do what they do best!

Lasting productivity gains will be through people. Therefore, it is imperative that our people are treated as adults, treated as partners in the enterprise, treated with dignity, and treated with respect. When this occurs, and when all of these attributes are common place in the organization, the most salient ingredient of all will be onmipresent, trust.

Stick to the Knitting

Businesses often fail in our communities because they lose sight of their original intent or purpose. And, on a larger scale, multi-national corporations make grievious errors in ever increasing their acquisitions. Some diversification is a basis for stability, but willy-nilly expansions do not pay--by any measure.

I am wondering whether the communty colleges have blackened their own eyes by trying to be "everything to everybody" at the post-secondary level. Is a blacklash occurring now in legislatures and in our communities to the exuberance we displayed in expanding the mission of the community college?

Perhaps it is time for us to seriously ask the question, are we sticking to the knitting? If we do not ask the question and have alternatives identified from which to choose, others will. And, those others are state legislators, statewide governing boards of community colleges, and other state agencies with whom we compete for fewer dollars.

Simultaneous Loose-Tight Properties

Organizations that live by the loose-tight principle are on the one hand rigidly controlled, yet at the same time allow and even insist upon autonomy, entrepreneurship, and innovations from every one. To accomplish this rather remarkable feat the basic characteristics of stated values and trust are implicitly inherent in the operation. We must beleive in the worth of the faculty, support staff, administration, and students and the employers of our students. We must believe in us!

Conclusion

Continuous innovation in the most efficient use of our resources is the key to survival and excellence.

I believe Mr. Peters and Mr. Waterman have identified eight principles which have applicability to the community colleges. And further, they have identified the most valuable resource we have, people. The descriptors used for the nation's best companies should be those for community colleges: Service, quality, winners, discipline, values, innovators, simple, excitement, autonomous, small, informal, and communicators. Innovate with people!

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